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Seafood Imported by Air in February

Live and fresh seafood have continued to be in good demand in Japan. According to a recent report on seafood, total imports have increased despite a decrease in some varieties of shellfish and mollusk.

The total import for February was 11,620 tons with a value of 12,442,948,000 yen, a small decrease from the previous month, (an increase of 3.1% from the same month last year, with the value improving by 2.9% due to a depreciation of the yen).

Those seafood imports that increased include: live eel, fresh and frozen salmon, tuna, sea bream, globefish, Spanish mackerel. Fresh and frozen seafood comprised 70% of total imports by air. Norwegian Atlantic salmon showed a 6.8% increase from the same month last year.

Import prices of Atlantic salmon by country:

Norway	589 yen per kilo	(669 yen for the same month last year)
England	627 yen per kilo	(727 yen for the same month last year)
Canada	657 yen per kilo	(681 yen for the same month last year)
USA	582 yen per kilo	(---)
Chile	(---)	(705 yen for the same month last year)
Australia	687 yen per kilo	(830 yen for the same month last year)

Imports of shellfish and mollusk have decreased overall with the quantity of shellfish going down by 9%. Imports of both shrimp and crab declined from last year.

(Nikkan Hokkai Keizai Newspaper, dated March 30, 2001)

Alaskan Sablefish

The sablefish season in Alaska opened mid-March, though Japanese buyers have not been showing much interest, as the packer's prices are too high. Alaska's quota this year TAC is 12,840 tons for Gulf of Alaska and 4,060 tons for Bering and Aleutian, a total of 16,900 tons.

Last year, the actual harvest for the Gulf of Alaska was 13,777 tons (with a quota of 13,330 tons), and the Bering Sea total was 1,631 tons (with a quota of 3,200 tons). The total Alaska sablefish harvest amounted to 15,408 tons.

The estimated total in dressed product was approx. 10,000 tons last year - this low volume is anticipated again this year. The season started with a high of \$3.60/lb., which equates to \$5.00/lb. in produced price.

According to a major packer in Sitka, FOB per pound is: \$3.85 for 2-3 lbs., \$4.20 for 3-4 lbs., \$4.50 for 4-5 lbs., \$4.75 for 5-7 lbs., \$4.65 for 7 lbs. and up.

Japanese buyers are losing interest as fear of a severe price drop takes hold. The prices offered by importer's hit a high of 1,430 yen per kilo for 5-7 lbs. at the end of February, then sharply decreasing sharply in the following weeks. A major producer sold at 1,300 yen per kilo though prices have decreased since then. Under these circumstances, importers are finding it impossible to purchase this year's product in this fluctuating market and will wait until prices decrease.

Market insiders are speculating that the price of sablefish will fall this year to 1,300 yen per kilo or lower - to the Japanese buyers anticipated market price.

(Nikkan Hokkai Keizai newspaper, dated March 31, 2001)

Salted Ikura

Sales of salted ikura have been slow. Although an accurate inventory is not available, it is thought that some inventory may still be left in the market. By the time the new North American ikura supply becomes available some inventory will be around, though this was not the case last year. The small roe from Prince William Sound indicates that the marketing it will not be quick this year. Distributors predict that the price must be substantially lowered for it to sell.

Market forecasters predict that ikura prices this year could be in the range of 4,500 yen per kilo for domestic and 3,500 yen per kilo for imported product. Expectations are that trout roe (masuko) could be lower than 3,000 yen per kilo. The market for domestic ikura seems to be weakening with prices running 200 to 300 yen less than the offered price and fewer quantities of ikura sold at 5,000 yen per kilo.

(Nikkan Keizai Newspaper, dated March 31, 2001)